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# On attachment and belonging: Or why queers mourn homophobic president?

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## Abstract

In this article I ask why gay and lesbian people in Poland mourned their infamously homophobic president Lech Kaczynski, and, in turn, what it means to mourn one's own enemy. In examining this extraordinary case of national bereavement and the collective performance of grief, I point to complex models of attachment that position Polish homosexual subjects in a locus where they are able to enter the national discourse as subjects, and not only as objects. I stress the role of identification rather than identity, relationality, processuality and performativity in understanding the relations between nationhood and homosexuality. Homosexual subjects attaining the rituals of national bereavement break the chains of interlinked subject positions and social expectations. In doing so, nationhood is rendered a "hybrid" space of identification for the homosexual subject. Consequently, mourning becomes an act of "queering" the nation, a wilful subversion of culturally and traditionally sanctioned performative recollections of nationhood (Polishness).

## Keywords

Attachment, belonging, homonationalism, LGBT, mourning, melancholic nationalism, melancholic sexual politics, Poland

On 10 April 2010, on the way to Katyn (Russia) for an official Polish–Russian state event commemorating the Polish victims of the Stalinist regime, nearly 100 people died when a government plane carrying the Polish political elite crashed. Amongst the dead was the president of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, and what followed the tragedy was a seven-day period of national bereavement. This triggered my

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curiosity: would lesbian and gay people mourn this death of the president as well? After all, he was a publicly and outspokenly homophobic politician. He was the one who, as the Mayor of Warsaw, forbade two Pride marches in 2004 and 2005, and he actively played this card in his successful presidential campaign. Later, as the president of Poland he made numerous public statements of a homophobic nature (e.g. *gazeta.pl*, 2008; *Independent.ie*, 2007; *Prezydent RP*, 2008). Taking this into account, perhaps one would not expect much grief within the lesbian and gay community after the death of 'their leader'. However, what I observed was exactly the opposite – not only active participation in the acts of mourning, but also a heated debate about whether 'to mourn or not to mourn' (rather clearly verging towards grieving). Here, one needs to add and remember that the political elite on the plane, although mostly conservative, also included representatives of the other political options, including Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, a former Plenipotentiary For the Equal Status of Women and Men, who was well known among the lesbian and gay communities for her supportive work in the area of anti-discrimination. However, the discussions over 'strategic mourning' were clearly to do with the political elite in general, and president Kaczynski in particular.

It should be mentioned that in many cases worldwide, the relation between homosexuality and national culture is often seen as hostile and unaccommodating. Although there are some common traces for all, each national culture also has its own more specific roots of homophobic dismissal of homosexuality. This is also true for Poland, where the Catholic Church, or projections and fears over joining the EU, among others, has been identified by academics, activists, politicians, and press (Graff, 2008, 2010; Mizielinska, 2001; O'Dwyer and Schwartz, 2010; Sobczyk, 2013). Also, Polish society remains on the conservative, rather than progressive, side in relation to homosexuality (although this depends on the actual question asked) (CBOS, 1988, 1994, 2002, 2010). This article points to complex modes of relating and identifications that problematize the presumed hostility of Polish nation and homosexuality, and is part of a recently concluded, larger research project examining and questioning the relations of nationhood and homosexuality in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe (Kulpa, 2011, 2012).

This article revolves around the questions: 'Why do homosexuals mourn a homophobic president?' and 'What does it mean to mourn one's enemy?' In approaching the problem, I will make use of such categories as memory, attachment, forgetting, work of mourning and melancholia. Each of these categories and related concepts has a substantial history of use and deployment especially within and under the influence of psychoanalytical theories (e.g. Benjamin, 1974; Derrida, 2001; Freud, 1957, 2006). However, my understanding comes from the work of Eng (1999, 2000), Gilroy (2004), Akcan (2005) and Khanna (2006), who operationalise the aforementioned categories as cultural interpretative codes, or interdisciplinary tools of cultural analysis, rather than relying upon strictly psychoanalytical or psychotherapeutic understandings. This is an important acknowledgement, clarifying the relation between the 'material' and 'discursive' aspect of my analysis and

source materials, and the 'psychic worlds' of the people whose posts are being analysed. By switching the conceptual registers I hope to show that the tensions arising in their intersections are productive *stimuli*, rather than obstacles. This approach could be termed 'psychosocial', an emerging and promising new (inter)-discipline that not only tries to 'upgrade' one discipline with the lessons (and concepts) from another, but creates a new academic space – something of a 'third space' – for understanding the relations of individual and group self (cf. Clarke, 2003, 2006; Frosh, 2010).

As materials and sources, I use internet users' posts in online discussions archived as commemorative articles published on three major lesbian and gay websites (gejowo.pl; innastrona.pl; homiki.pl). The reason for such a choice is that online forums were the only live and available sites of activity and discussion during the national bereavement week, as all other social and cultural institutions and outlets were either shut down, suspended, or inactive. However, mine is not an empirical study of the internet as such (for rich literature on using the internet in a sociological study, including various ethical issues, see, e.g. Daniel, 2011; Dicks et al., 2005; Jones, 1999). Still, there are at least two methodological issues that need to be acknowledged here: representativeness and ethics of research. I do not claim that the online posts and discussions I investigate are in any sense representative of the entire lesbian and gay community since I do not think 'full' representation is possible at all (see Hall, 1996), or that there is only one such group as a 'gay and lesbian community'. I treat these voices more as discursive instances that contribute to the wider framework of discourses on nation and homosexuality. Although small-scale, the research has wider resonance because the adopted case study approach facilitates the connection between the 'particular' and the 'general' (Breckner and Rupp, 2002: 300; Gerring, 2007: 1). The reader should also bear in mind that the article is based on the analysis of over one hundred comments and posts, which are exemplified by only a few quotes in this article. In terms of the ethics of using internet forums for my own research purposes, I treat online posts as texts of the public domain. This is because they are publicly available to see and reply to, by anyone, without any need to register or agree to any (special) terms and conditions (for an excellent study of cyberspace, nationality, and sexuality, see Kuntsman, 2009).

In my explorations of the complex and unpredictable relations between the national and homosexual subjectivity, I have been inspired by Eng and Kazanjian's statement:

[W]hile the twentieth century resounds with catastrophic losses of bodies, spaces, and ideals, psychic and material practices of loss and its remains are productive for history and for politics. Avowals of and attachments to loss can produce a world of remains as a world of new representations and alternative meanings. (2003: 5)

In this spirit, rather than interpreting queer mourning of a homophobic national icon as a regressive withdrawal from sexual liberation politics, and conceding to

oppressive nationalism – I want to present a case of queer bereavement as a wilful and subversive act of queering the nation (nationalising queer?) that is possible, perhaps because the ‘nation is always already a little queer’, a statement to which I return at the end of this article. In doing so, I first explore the thematic fields of identity and identifications and attachment as the condition of sexual politics, and then continue elaborating on issues of regression/subversion, and mourning and homosociality.

If, as Tom Boellstroff writes . . .

[t]he question of belonging is central to the experience of being gay or lesbi, [then] [t]hese concepts are self-evidently not from tradition, family, or ethnolocality; yet they are experienced as both intimate aspects of selfhood and national phenomena (2005: 222)

. . . then belonging, thus, is a fundamental issue in the relations between the nation and homosexual subject. The main argument I want to pursue in this article is that when the Polish lesbian and gay communities participated in the national rituals of mourning after the death of the political elite and (homophobic) President Kaczynski, they were performing an act of (self)inclusion into the national community, from which they are normally discursively excluded as Others. This, however, suggests the possibility of arising ambivalences and tensions on the crossroads of (often pejorative) (self-)identifications. And it is perhaps the ambivalence of all relations that should become a focal point in this article about homosexuality, nation and belonging. I suggest that at times of great significance to the national’s narration of self (as the death of the president), what occurs among lesbian and gay people, is not the renunciation of Polishness but a participation, and perhaps even ‘over-performance’ in the national rituals of mourning; and this was the way in which Polish homosexual subjects performed their ‘communion within the nation’. Perhaps this is what Agnieszka Graff (2008) has argued for (although not unproblematically), when she called on feminist and lesbian and gay activists to not give up on patriotism and to not abandon it just because of nationalist abuse. And as time has shown, they have not.

### **Queer melancholia: Identifying with that which repudiates you?**

The work of mourning performed by the Polish gay and lesbian communities highlights, firstly, that the work of memory is a work of enactment and participation; and secondly, that ‘identities’ are not unitary and fixed, and it is the process of *identification* rather than ‘identity’ which seems a more useful category of analysis. In *Precarious Life* Judith Butler writes that

[p]erhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to

undergo a transmutation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance. (2006: 21)

The 'submitting to a transformation' is an act of openness, and lack of foreclosure to the possibility of becoming/being. The ideas of foreclosure and forgetting are useful concepts in the further analysis of my case. It is nothing new to write that remembrance is the foundation of collectivity (e.g. Bal et al., 1999; Connerton, 1989; Huyssen, 2003; Zelizer, 1998). However, forgetting also accompanies this process of collective identification, as a consequence of selecting out exactly what must be remembered, and what must not be remembered. Moreover, the forgetting in which I am interested here, is not the simple opposite of remembering, but a more profound process of *forgetting as denial*, as elaborated in the recent works of Judith Butler (2006, 2009). Butler shows how the forgetting/denying of the humanity of the Other is the fundamental act of collectivity (see also Durrant, 2004: 5–6). I concur with her ethical standpoint, according to which we should seek to abandon such practices.

In the Polish context, we could observe the foreclosure of gays and lesbians as 'proper humans' and thus denial of 'a place at the national table', to be called 'Poles'. There are numerous examples, beginning with conservative nationalist discourse, portraying homosexuality as alien, foreign, through politicians comparing homosexual people to necrophiliacs (Przybylska, 2006; Rewinski, 2006), to cartoonists scornfully ridiculing same-sex partnerships as equivalent to human-goat marriage (Karpieszuk, 2009; Krauze, 2009; Lisicki, 2009). So when the president and other political elite died and gay and lesbian people mourned, when the forgotten knocked on the nation's door, some un-homely and uncanny spectre began to haunt the very 'identity' of Polishness and gayness. Remembrance consolidates and disturbs the simple 'either/or' dialectic between the nation and homosexual belonging. So when the discussion whether 'to mourn or not to mourn' Kaczynski appeared on the LGBT online forums, it was the call of 'let's not forget that he was a human' that seemed one of the most pervasive and often repeated arguments. Let me quote a few:

Tadeusz: '[w]e are one in our nature, in humanity. It doesn't matter what you think, what you believe, what you see as good and bad – death doesn't differentiate'. (homiki.pl, 2010)

KaFor: 'Let's build unity in respect of human life – every life'. (homiki.pl, 2010)

Prometeusz: 'No words to describe the dimension of this tragedy. I feel a deep sadness, despite the differences between me and President Kaczynski. Almost 100 people died, most of them well known. Despair after each life taken away from us again by Katyn. May they rest in peace'. (innastrona.pl, 2010)

zwyczajny: 'I think a great tragedy has happened, even though I disagreed with some politicians who died. It's not important anymore which [political] options they

represented, which party they were from. They all deserve respect, because first of all, they were people, wives, husbands, parents ... I join in pain the families of the dead, and give true condolences. To the dead – may god remember your souls'. (gejowo.pl, 2010)

In this very call for remembrance, we hear the call of the gay and lesbian communities to themselves: let us not foreclose the humanity of Kaczynski, let us not render him as the permanent figure of the enemy/Other. In this gesture that is different from foreclosure/expulsion, there is perhaps a new way of constituting ourselves/community; not as 'gays and lesbians' against the 'nation' as enemy, but in a more inclusive and accommodating process of 'common living'. This may be a greater revalorisation of *identifications* rather than fixed 'identities' of neatly demarcated boundaries and supposedly sharp distinctions of what one is/is not. As the homosexual subjects mourn their 'enemy' in the body of the homophobic president Kaczynski, they are reminded of their own wounds. User 'Stryj' has expressed this explicitly:

Nobody's just good or just bad. Everyone is worth respect. Shouldn't homosexual people, often denied such human respect, be more empathic in a situation like this? (homiki.pl, 2010)

'Stryj' directly calls upon the homosexual subject's memory of its own wounds: exclusion, verbal and physical abuse that many experience, in order to not perpetuate the same polarising discourse of 'friend or enemy', but to overcome this harmful dialectics.

In calling upon the humanity of the supposed 'enemy', and foregrounding his humanity rather than political affiliation or past denigration of homosexuality, homosexual subjectivity flows beyond the fixation of 'identities', towards the commonality – humanity, grief, loss – as the shared features to all of us; features in which 'friend/enemy' identitarian politics can be overcome in the gesture of building inclusive sociality and national collectivity:

It's not about whether you miss somebody or not, it is about human tragedy! That's the difference. Kaczynski was as he was, but he was a president of Your country, and that's why [we should] respect [him]. (homiki.pl, 2010)

The death of the head of the state also necessarily reminds us of the Polish nation's own fragility and its possibility of being wounded: his dead body is the spectre of non-existence in the tormented history of Poland.<sup>1</sup> Thus, not surprisingly the patriotic tone is not uncommon in the commemorative inscriptions.

wolny: 'Tragedy in life may happen to everyone. It happened to the presidential couple and the [political and cultural] elite. [...] They have died in the service to the



nation. I respect and mourn after them, even though I have different political views and opinions'. (gejowo.pl, 2010)

przemonice: 'I am gay, I am a sensitive person. I cried all day when I have learned that the flower of the Polish political elite, Polish right, president with wife, president Kaczorowski – the last president of our country in exile, they all have died'. (gejowo.pl, 2010)

Reflecting on the homosexual subjects' mourning of the homophobic president brings to mind the writings of Douglas Crimp, especially his *Melancholia and Moralism* (2004). In this collection of essays, to use the back cover words:

Crimp confronts the conservative gay politics that replaced the radical AIDS activism of the late 1980s and early 1990s. He shows that the cumulative losses from AIDS, including the waning of militant response, have resulted in melancholia as Freud defined it: gay men's dangerous identification with the moralistic repudiation of homosexuality by the wider society.

For Crimp, the normalisation (and normativity) of gay politics that has recently taken place in the United States, and the withdrawal and inability to "act radically" (or indeed, to act in anything other than complacency with the social "norm") results in the disfranchisement of activism. He identifies this conservatism of (some strands of) sexual politics with the disarming effects (affects?) of a melancholic and prolonged attachment. Paradoxically, it means the identification with that which repudiates you. In the case of gay politics, as Crimp argues, 'queer melancholia' means an identification with the normative and normalising society and national culture. In light of this, I ask if the case of the Polish homosexual subject partaking in the national rituals of mourning is also such an act of melancholic 'disempowerment'? And my answer is: not necessarily ...

### **Queer melancholia: Attachment as the condition of sexual politics**

As we have seen above, the loss of the president and political elite becomes a wound, and also a memory of the wound – it signifies the impossibility of forgetting about the nation and its history, and their necessary imprint on everyone's life (irrespective of their sexual identity). It is also reworked as a human tragedy, a pain to which everyone is subjected in their life (regardless of their political identity). 'Wound' and 'injury', real and symbolic, as conditions of attachment are the starting point for Wendy Brown's reflections upon identity politics in *States of Injury* (1995). For her, modern politics based on claims of 'politicized' identities (gender, sexuality, ethnicity) are the result of liberalism's failure in fulfilling its promise of justice and equality for all. It also means, according to Brown, that claims based on identities are futile in their aimed transformative attempt.

Because identity politics relate to, and rely upon our own history of injury, in order to sustain its claim, it must necessarily scratch its own wounds to make claims and draw legitimisation upon them. As a consequence, in the words of Doezeema (2001: 20),

[in] seeking protection from the same structures that cause injury, this politics risks reaffirming, rather than subverting, structures of domination, and risks reinscribing injured identity in law and policy through its demands for state protection against injury.

Countering Crimp's (2004) above argument, one of my claims in this article is that the homosexual subject's (somewhat ambivalent) attachment to the Polish national community and LGBT activism to the idea of 'Freedom/Poland' ('free to be yourself') is not a disarming affectation or a pathological state, which comes with attachment (especially in its melancholic form) (Freud, 1957: 243). The 'queer melancholia' explored in my case study contributes to the proliferation of understandings of attachment (melancholic or otherwise), rather than being a conflicting discord with Crimp's conceptualisation. This dissimilitude originates in more optimistic readings of Freud via Eng and Kazanjian (2003), and Khanna (2006). Social activism stemming from the attachment *is* possible because melancholia may be understood otherwise, as a sort of becoming (Butler, 2003; Min, 2003). David Eng and David Kazanjian, in their introduction to *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (2003: 3–4), argue that

[f]or instance, we might observe that in Freud's initial conception of melancholia, the past is neither fixed nor complete. Unlike mourning, in which the past is declared resolved, finished, and dead, in melancholia the past remains steadfastly alive in the present.

This continuous engagement with the loss thus 'generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future' (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003: 4). Ranjana Khanna makes a similar point when she writes that

[m]elancholia, however, is not simply a crippling attachment to a past that acts like a drain of energy on the present [. . .]. Rather, the melancholic's critical agency, and the peculiar temporality that drags it back and forth at the same time, acts toward the future. (2006: 3)

In fact, what I perceive to be at the heart of Polish sexual politics is the already mentioned 'wounded attachment' (Brown, 1993, 1995). However, the melancholic 'never-let-go' attachment *and* national identification are also important; these two attachments fuel sexual politics in Poland. 'Wound' and 'melancholia' make homosexual subjects fight back for their rights (some call it 'sexual citizenship'), and create the vision of 'Free Poland' that would recognise and accommodate a

diversity of subject positions, and that would not foreclose itself to the (sexual) Other. Ultimately, this is a reflection and continuation of the previous national struggles for the independence and sovereignty of Poland from the political and cultural influence of the USSR, and previously, Nazis, and earlier Austrian, Prussian and Russian empires. But since it responds to the 'history of injury' of both subject positions (national *and* homosexual) rather than just one of them (and additionally, one against the another), it somehow diminishes the negativity of the identity politics, otherwise perhaps too constraining, as Brown wants. The memory of the nation's 'wound' as much as its own 'history of injury' inspires lesbian and gay peoples' struggle for the new 'Free Poland' (to live their lives as they wish). But since the two wounds often preclude themselves (especially in some conservative discourses of nation and somehow normative discourses of sexual liberation), the living by the two of them at once, the tensions and ambivalences they must necessarily evoke – it seems to produce somewhat disarming effects on both 'identities', thus proving productive and subversive in this *identification*.

The situation of mourning after the death of president Kaczynski in 2010 (and also five years earlier after the death of the Pope) was a moment when discussions about pride marches ignited. In 2005 Adam Ostolski published an article 'Zaloba po odwołanym marszu' (Grief after the cancelled march), in which he argued against the decision by Krakow's 'March For Tolerance' organisers to cancel the march. He believes that '[the] decision to cancel the march seems to be not only a symptom of disturbing submissiveness towards homophobes' expectations, but, worse, it is based on a few erroneous arguments' (Ostolski, 2005). Ostolski then moves to listing arguments for organising the march just after the official mourning period after the death of Pope John Paul II. One of the main issues pursued in these strategic discussions (on organising public events) is the idea of freedom, precisely 'Free Poland' (although it is not explicitly named), where the rights of gay and lesbian people are seen as universal human rights in struggles towards which no event/situation can or should be an obstacle.

In 2010, another discussion about the shape of sexual politics and strategies took place. This is visible in numerous posts under already mentioned articles on gay websites, posted after the death of President Kaczynski (gejowo.pl, 2010; homiki.pl, 2010; innastrona.pl, 2010). In particular, the discussion sparked questions about the organisation or cancellation of the 2010 Europride march, which eventually took place in Warsaw in July 2010 (i.e. three months after the president's death). Other examples included a cancelled film festival and other events as part of the 'LGBT pride cultural week' held in Lodz in April, and a postponed and rescheduled 'Day of Silence Against Homophobia' (Amnesty International Polska, 2010; Dzień Milczenia, 2010).

The second thread in these discussions concerned the form of LGBT activism/behaviour:<sup>2</sup> what to do in this crisis situation? And what should be done by 'homo/sexual citizens' in order not to disrupt the national grief. But also importantly: how to capitalise on the appropriate behaviour? In a way, the whole discussion whether 'to mourn or not to mourn' is about survivability as Polish sexual citizens, thus it

bears marks of strategic thinking about the future (even if not formulated in such praxis-oriented terms). Also, the fact that all the lesbian and gay websites (commercial and NGOs) changed their graphic look to monochromatic black and white and went into a one week ‘coma’ (as did all other media outlets in Poland), is an example of ‘strategic’ practice that could have further-reaching consequences (than in the case of non-LGBT media outlets). It is well summarised in the words of user QUASIMODO:

I think (my suggestion is) that it would be a sign of good manners to call off this year’s Parade. Why would we want to aggravate conflicts in a society marked by such great tragedy. For sure, such a move would not have damaged us, actually, to the contrary. (homiki.pl, 2010)

### **Subversive nation queering or “folding-in” the national hegemony?**

Recently there has been a much needed and welcomed increase in writings about ‘sexual nationalisms’ and ‘homonationalism’ in queer studies (Ahmed, 2011; Bilge and Scheibelhofer, 2012; *darkmatter* Journal, 2008; El-Tayeb, 2011; Fassin, 2010; Jivraj and De Jong, 2011; Kuntsman and Miyake, 2008; Mepschen et al., 2010; Puar, 2007; Sabsay, 2012; Tauqir et al., 2011). These various writings, and the debates they have provoked, have provided me with inspiration and insight, and my case study of Poland and Central and Eastern Europe is positioned as a dialogical expansion of them. There are several reasons for that. ‘Homonationalism’ is defined by Jasbir Puar as:

[a] way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e. the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e. gay marriage and families). The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain – but certainly not most – homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the ‘measures of benevolence’ that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity. This benevolence toward sexual others is contingent upon ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity. (2007: xii)

In the Polish context, there is no ‘mainstreaming’ of lesbian and gay politics through, for example, the normalising gesture of ‘homoinclusiveness’ (although there are normative undercurrents present and deployed by the LGBT organisations themselves). Since Poland is not a multi-ethnic country (Polish citizenship: 99.7% of population; Polish national-ethnic cultural belonging: 93.7%; other ethnic belonging declared by 3.6%, of which 2.1% declared double Polish and non-Polish ethnic identification, and only 1.5% ‘exclusively’ non-Polish; GUS, 2012), questions

concerning multiculturalism and racism cannot be directly transposed into the Polish context. And the 'traditionally Polish' anti-Semitism plays a rather different role in these configurations (Kulpa, 2012). Whilst they may desire norms of 'social respectability' and 'good citizenship' by embracing neoliberal values, gay and lesbian people in Poland are certainly not (yet?) the 'consumers of privilege' in the same way as their 'mainstream gay and lesbian' counterparts in some Western countries may arguably be (Chasin, 2000; Duggan, 2004; Evans, 1993).

Additionally, literature examining the dynamics of homosexual subjects' belonging to the nation in Western contexts often differentiates between 'mainstream LGBT' and 'alternative queer' politics. The former are understood to comply with the nationalist discourses, while the latter are arguably more critical and sceptical about such 'homoinclusion'. However, this does not seem to have much to do with the young lesbian and gay movements in the CEE, where the distinctions seem to be much more blurred, and not arising in 'waves' of development (Kulpa and Mizielska, 2011a). (Not to mention that the situation is also more complex in those 'Western' contexts, which makes such classifications highly problematic to begin with.)

In this article I argue that homosexual subjects are not straightforwardly objectified as 'marionettes' of the carefully orchestrated national politics (where they are invited into the circle of privilege, which depends on the exclusion of some Others, e.g. migrant communities). Instead, I show that they are exerting agency and wilful subversion towards national discourses, and that sexual politics in Poland cannot be deemed as 'depoliticised' and 'domesticated'. The tensions and problematic nature of 'homonationalism' in relation to the CEE context have led me to offer an alternative concept – 'Western *leveraged pedagogy* of CEE' – on which I elaborate elsewhere (Kulpa, 2014).

In my further analysis, I draw on the work of Diana Taylor (1999: 206) who observed that when Princess Diana died in 1997, ethnic minorities in the UK and many other groups of people around the world were put in a position of 'passive recipients' of (UK) national grief. She elaborates on this phenomenon, moving beyond the simple conclusion that it worked solely as a modern extension of the former British colonial hegemony. In all the ambivalence, Taylor (1999: 202) proposes to see ethnic minority mourners as active agents and not passive observers of the mourning drama. In the Polish case, one could say that grief over the outspokenly homophobic president Kaczynski could not be shared by the lesbian and gay community – it was not theirs. But at the same time, I am more interested in acknowledging the homosexual subject not only as 'submissive receivers', but also as 'active performers' in the national spectacle of grief, thus rendering the 'nation' as an ambivalent and more accommodating space of homosexual *identifications*. In other words, I am absorbed by modes of 'queering the nation' by performing subversive and wilful acts of identifications that destabilise the (hegemonic) framework of nation.

Of course, gay and lesbian participation in the rituals of nation may also be interpreted as a 'failure' of its activism: a regressive step backwards and giving up

in the struggle (as often argued within homonationalism debates, and in the Polish context by Ostolski, 2005). Without completely rejecting this argument, I want to favour the alternative viewpoint, according to which the situation may be read in terms of subversion of the nation's logic. When lesbians and gay men joined millions of other Poles in the public expression of their grief, they mourned not only as Poles after their president, but also as homosexuals mourning their own 'enemy' in the body of Lech Kaczynski. As such they took part in the process of consolidation of the imaginary community of the nation – a process which is denied them as Others. But also by proactively grieving, without waiting for anyone to accept and confirm them as 'legal' members of the national community, Polish homosexual subjects, by doing what is precluded and forbidden to them, usurped the right to self-constitution in their own belonging, and subverted the presumed exclusionary nation's space according to their will.<sup>3</sup>

Mourning President Kaczynski – an act of suffering after the loss – becomes an act of redemption from Otherness into Polishness, a form of 'redemptive suffering', so typical of the Polish nation's narration of the Self (Ziarek, 2007: 311). Paul Gilroy (2004: 110) also observes a similar process of a minority buying itself into nation in the postcolonial UK. This is possible because 'mourning' denotes (1) performance and (2) the affect of grief.<sup>4</sup> But what would be the performance of grief in this odd context of lesbians and gays mourning a homophobic president? Using Taylor's words again:

[P]erformance makes visible (for an instant, 'live', 'now') that which is always already there – the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life. These specters, made manifest through performance, alter future phantoms, future fantasies. (1999: 195)

So in the performative aspect of mourning after the deceased, in the act of crying, the transformation of 'identity' occurs. In tears the national and the homosexual are no longer exclusive 'identity' positions; in tears of *identification* with fellow nationals, the performative aspect of being what one is socially perceived to be ('Perverted Homo') dissolves into 'simple' *being as if* somebody/something else ('Homo the Pole'). Rather than rejection, we observe a transformation of the role of the nation for the homosexual subjectivity.

This brings to mind Sara Ahmed's concept of an 'affect alien', that is 'to be out of line with the public mood, not to feel the way others feel in response to an event' (Ahmed, 2010: 157). Because homosexuals do not want to remain on the outskirts of the national community as 'affect aliens' they mourn and, in the same act, do not really put aside their gay 'identity', but rather are/perform as 'gay' and as 'Poles' in their *identification* with nation. Performing in this sad event has something, paradoxically, of a 'happiness promise' and is a 'hopeful performative' (Ahmed, 2010: 200). As we repeat the word 'happiness' believing that by repetitive recitation happiness occurs/will be, so when the homosexual subject performs Polishness (by taking part in the national rituals of mourning), they also hope that it makes

them/will make them Poles. Being 'Homosexual the Pole' will thereby be achieved: the subjectivity of the Polish/national and the Other/homosexual will be reconciled as One, opening up new spaces of sociality.

## Mourning and homosociality

Among other functions, homophobia is the negative referent of LGBT politics and the gay and lesbian communities (rendering nation-as-Other). It is also the expression of nationalist resentment towards the homosexual-as-Other. But in homosocial cultures of dominant masculinity this resentment adds up to homo-eroticism (discharge of homosexuality and compulsive heterosexual fantasy performed by men for the pleasure of other men) of the national collective. As Plonowska Ziarek comments, with reference to Freud's *Totem and Taboo*:

Freud demonstrates how the sons' murder of the primal father was transformed into collective identifications with the empty place of lawful symbolic authority. [...] [P]erhaps we can also hear in this story traces of the archaic and ambivalent homosexual object relation (brother's hatred and erotic love of the father), the loss of which, as in the case of melancholia, is also replaced by identification with the dead object. (2007: 315)

In the national (male-identified) adoration of the leader (another male) we observe an expression of desire for manliness (politics as the rule of the 'firm hand' against the Other/homosexual), so eagerly performed by Kaczynski himself as the president/father of the national family (Kulpa, 2012). We see that homo-eroticism is inscribed into the process of national identification/identification with the nation. The death of the head of state (an object of national desire) turns the world upside-down. While the gates are not guarded, Otherness, traditionally assigned to 'femininity', enters the sphere of the national (masculine) through such 'female' characteristics as grief, emotionality, mellowness, and compassion. To understand better the specificity of this 'world turned upside-down' we may look into anthropological literature, especially the writings of Victor Turner. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1995), he links death to, among other phenomena, the state of liminality, i.e. of 'in-betweenness'. Turner writes:

[T]he attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. (1995: 95)

I wonder if we could argue that the homosexual subject as the Other mourning the nation's (homophobic) leader locates itself in the position of such 'threshold people'? 'Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the position assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial' (Turner 1995: 95). In Poland, excluded as Other, the homosexual subject does not



belong to the socially and politically sanctioned space of sociality/nation. And yet, s/he dares to act against their assigned role/place in the hierarchy of inclusion/exclusion, thus bridging the boundaries of collectivity, somehow opening/forcing its displacement. It is this 'betwixt and between' that becomes the accommodating ground for something new to happen. But this is only possible because of the extraordinary time of mourning, when all the normative routines get (partially) suspended. The homosexual Other, which in the nation's heteronormative (and masculinised) discourse is ostracised as weak, mellow, soft, emotional – i.e. 'feminine' – uses precisely those qualities to invert his/her own position. At a time when the usual performances of the 'normal' and 'masculine' of the nation are suspended in bereavement, it is precisely the ('abnormal' of) 'feminine' that is embraced. Death of the president reminds us of the fragility and vulnerability of the human body/being. It also helps to reevaluate and appreciate (if only temporally) the 'female' emotional care we give each other. The national collectivity of paternal law and order softens into a sociality of precarious lives. In the moment of grief, when the 'feminine' qualities of emotional care take precedence over the 'masculine' rigid law, the homosexual Other finds his/her gateway into the heart of the nation. Death opens the gate and allows the (feminised) Other to use this temporal aberration in the life cycle of the nation and to enter the sacredness of the (masculine) national temporality. Perhaps the status of the Otherness, existing somewhere in what could be designated as 'the threshold of the norm', is also what facilitates its 'communion within the collectivity' of the nation at the moment of the extraordinary.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, this process is mediated and facilitated through gender/gendered categories. The negotiation (and reconciliation) of sociality anew occurs in the womb of culturally designated 'femininity' of emotional care, respectability and recognition of the precariousness of life.

After Freud we could say, then, that the death of the father (here president, 'the father of the national family') enables his 'bastard children' to *identify* symbolically with the empty place of paternal authority – to *identify* with Polishness. When the body is dead, it is death that tears the veil of the nation down to reveal it as nothing more than the space of empty universality, to be constantly replenished anew (Laclau, 1996). Yet once again the whole situation appears to be a little queer: feminised Otherness penetrating the masculine nation only to become part of this body of Polonia (rendering it as, well, *transsexual*?).

## Conclusions: Mutual desire

In this article I have used the notion of attachment as a point of departure in the analysis of the homosexual subject's mourning after the tragic death of (the infamously homophobic) president Lech Kaczynski in April 2010. Placed somewhere within the emerging area of psychosocial studies, the article shows the tensions and relational fluctuations in the ambiguous positions occupied (given and usurped) by the homosexual subjects. To better account for these shifting mechanisms of subjectification and alienation, I conceptualise these as identifications rather than



identities. 'Identity' – understood as a sort of given or acquired, but in either case, a fixed 'position label' (even if quickly changing set thereof) – proves rather an inefficient and insufficient tool for understanding a 'crisis situation' such as death and rituals of bereavement. Following Gergen (2000) and Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 111) who point out the inherent instability of 'sociality', my analysis shows that we need to go beyond 'sexuality' and 'nationality' as fixed positions/identities, because only then are we able to grasp their intimate complexity.

What emerged in the article, is a haunting question of what does it mean to 'queer the nation', especially if rooted in the desire to be a part of it? I have routed my discussion via the 'homonationalism' and 'sexual nationalisms' debates, considering their importance, but also pointing out their insufficiency in conceptualising the Polish case. In these debates, the homosexual subject is often seen in cooperation with nation and is exposed as complacent with the nationalist politics of racism and immigration control. Necessarily then, the relation of the two is understood in terms of domination and national subjugation of the once revolutionary sexual politics. True as it is, the case of queer bereavement for the homophobic president also shows the alternative possibilities for reading this relation(ship). Although my case may be seen as 'regressive' in the postponing of (supposedly radical) events by the gay and lesbian community in order to respect the pressures of the nation, I propose a more optimistic reading of it as 'subversion'.

I do so, because of the lessons taken from the academic writings about performativity and 'banal nationalisms'. As Beriss (1996: 189) rightly points out, nation is not a fixed monolithic actor driven by some *idée fixe*. 'Nation', we need to remember, is comprised of people engaged in everyday performances of everyday life (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008; Skey, 2011). Thus we can say, that when homosexual subjects take part in the rituals of national bereavement and mourning, they are overdoing and thus destabilising the nation's framework – they 'queer the nation'. Here 'doing' and 'partaking' becomes 'overdoing', for, in the first place as abject Others, homosexual subjects are not supposed to do what is only expected from 'proper' national subjects. Such an understanding of 'queering the nation', in turn, enabled me to argue that one of the driving forces of sexual activism in Poland after 1989 may stem from the 'wounded attachment' that also incorporates and bears traces of the Polish (melancholic) nationalism and its attachments. In the intersectional gesture, the combination of the two effectively disturbs each of them separately, easing their attachment bonds with their object(s), thus opening the possibilities for new forms of politics (not necessarily as harmful as single-identity focused politics).

The above discussion about the gay and lesbian community 'overcoming' supposedly mutually exclusive identity positions ('gay' vs. 'Pole') through the politics of relationality, reminds and confirms to us that nation and homosexuality, like Self and the Other, are interdependent formations. The situation resembles what Seiji M. Lippit writes about Japan's national identification with/against the 'West',

and also describes well the relation of the homosexual subject to the nation in Poland:

Yashiro discovers that his rejection of the West can never be absolute, for there is always a residue, a remainder that cannot be eradicated. [...] In this sense, Yashiro's encounter with Europe is not only a confrontation with the other, but, more importantly, a revelation of the other existing within. (Lippit, 2003: 238)

The consequence of this internally dis/junctive process is, after all, the bridging of the two. The Polish homosexual subject needs (to varying degrees, of course) the nation as their referent, therefore they are 'Polish homosexual people' rather than just 'homosexual people in Poland'. This perhaps obvious conclusion about the homosexual subject being already somewhat the national is worth pairing up with the one made by Jarrod Hayes (2000) that the nation is always already (a little) queer. And if so, that is why homosexual mourning for the homophobic president could occur in the first instance. Perhaps this is one of the many facets of sexual politics we could term 'queer'; germinating in a geo-temporally specific *locale*, inward-looking into cultural *here and now*, without much caring about the dominant theories of what 'queer' is/is not.

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### Notes

1. From 1795, Poland as an independent state was partitioned between Russian, Prussian and Austrian empires, and did not exist for the following 123 years. After a brief period of independence in the interwar period (1918–1939), it was again occupied by Nazis during the Second World War. The post-war period of state communism (until 1989) is also seen by many as a form of subjugation and lacking sovereignty. The destination – Katyn, as the place of the Stalinist massacre of the Polish military elite, just adds an additional twist to this tragedy. Finally, conservative and 'Euro sceptic' attitudes indicate insecurity by perceiving 'EUropeanization' as a threat to political and cultural sovereignty in Poland post-1989.
2. For more comprehensive engagement with the issue of LGBT activism in Poland and in Central and Eastern Europe in general, see, e.g. (Gruszczynska, 2009; Kulpa and Mizielińska, 2011b).
3. It may be worth mentioning the etymological roots of the word 'freedom'/'*wolność*' in Polish. '*Wolność*' shares its stem with '*wola*'/'*will*'; hence 'freedom' means: 'to act upon

one's will; be in agreement (with oneself); choose' (Brückner, 1996). In this context, lesbian and gay men's mourning is an act of *doing* freedom, rather than *acting upon* freedom. In the latter case, acting *upon* it, 'freedom' becomes some sort of abstracted idea, or a state, or a value existing on its own or independently of the subject. This would also mean the possibility of creating various facilitations or obstructions in accessing such constructed 'freedom'. If we revive freedom's etymological roots in 'will', then freedom can be re-rendered not as something 'external' to the subject, but as the subject's activity of acting on their choice/will. In this sense, mourning can be seen as a bold example of *doing freedom* outside the socially and politically constructed/constrained framework of law/recognition. This is not to say that there are limitless possibilities of agency available to lesbian and gay people, though. (The debate is far too complicated for such simple claims.)

4. See: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mourn>.
5. This point, nonetheless, needs to be taken with precaution. Simple equation of homosexual subjects with the liminal would be too quick. For Turner, the liminal is only a transitional period of existence, a space/time between two structured and regulated social orders. The Otherness of homosexuality, however, seems more a permanent rather than transitional relegation. (I thank Joanna Mizielińska, for highlighting this issue.)

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